

Dear Chairs Elliott and Slap, Vice Chairs Turco and Flexer, Ranking Members Haines and Witkos, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Delinah Hailey and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for H.B. 5033, an Act addressing the needs of food-insecure students at public institutions of higher education. This bill would require public institutions of higher education to assess and address food insecurity among students and to increase access to the supplemental nutrition assistance program for eligible students at institutions of higher education.

Black and low-income students are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. A study done by the University of Connecticut estimated that around 35% of Connecticut college students suffer from food insecurities. Among these alarming statistics, Black students constitute fifty-eight percent, which is 19% higher than the overall rate for students identifying as White or Caucasian. Students experiencing food insecurity are less likely to be able to perform well academically, have higher rates of depression, and have greater nutrition deficiencies.

Addressing food insecurity is an absolute priority and particularly important to me. I've done research and applied innovative design frameworks to address stigma and aid for youth experiencing food insecurity. In 2019, I was invited to represent the US to present my findings through this research at the global Design for Change summit in Rome, Italy. In my work, I spoke with individuals, young adults, and teenagers about their experiences with food insecurity and learned how being food insecure has such a profound impact in so many facets for them. As a college student on financial aid, I know how stressful this environment can be, particularly when finances are strained – it impacts how you are able to engage socially, academically, mentally, logistically and is a constant theme to navigating college. At the very least, access to food should never be a barrier to being able to successfully navigate college life.

This bill is essential because SNAP eligibility as it stands creates barriers for students most in need of support. Students enrolled more than half-time must work at least *20 hours a week* to be eligible for SNAP. But with the loss of on-campus work-study jobs and the closure of restaurants and other service sector businesses, many college students are being hit doubly hard--losing income as well as their SNAP benefits, with their route to eligibility cut off. A GAO report from last year showed almost 2 million college students who are potentially eligible have not reported receiving SNAP, many of whom are dissuaded from even applying because of the cryptic language that explains which students can get benefits. One in four students have had to take out loans to cover the cost of food, and one-third know someone who dropped out because they couldn't afford to eat, according to a recent study by Swipe Out Hunger and Chegg.

H.B. 5033 must be passed. It would start a Swipe Out Hunger program: for campuses that have meal plans, students should have the option to donate their extra meals to their peers facing food insecurity on campus, enabling these students access to a warm, nourishing meal at a dining hall. Also, the bill would establish food pantries: through an on-campus pantry or partnership with a local food bank, students should be able to regularly access food. Additionally, the bill

would create SNAP enrollment opportunities: campuses would designate a person to ensure students have access to accurate information about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including how to apply.

In conclusion, I urge you to address the needs of food-insecure students at public institutions of higher education. The consequences of food insecurity impact their ability to perform well in and out of school and have a life-long impact on their development and livelihood. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Higher Education Committee so that these individuals have a chance at fulfilling their best potential.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Delinah Hailey
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